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S E C R E T HELSINKI 000185

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/IET, INR/EAP, AND EUR/NB

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SUBJECT: ACEH: FINNISH INTERMEDIARY MORE PESSIMISTIC ABOUT  
PROSPECTS FOR HELSINKI TALKS

REF: STOCKHOLM 00246 (NOTAL)

Classified By: POLOFF DAVID ALLEN SCHLAEFER FOR REASONS 1.4 (B AND D)

1. (S) DCM Weisberg met with Juha Christensen on February 11 to discuss the Aceh talks in Helsinki. Christensen is the Finnish businessman who facilitated the introduction of former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari as a mediator between the GoI and GAM. Christensen was decidedly more pessimistic about the prospects for successful negotiations than he was when the DCM spoke with him last week. Christensen said that he believed there was only a 50-50 chance that the GAM leadership in Stockholm would agree to participate in a second round of talks in Helsinki (tentatively proposed for February 24). He attributed this to the dissatisfaction of GAM field commanders with the Stockholm group's handling of the first round of talks; in particular, Christensen said that the GAM field commander in Thailand was unhappy with the talks and believed the GAM's Stockholm leadership was "selling out" to the GoI by suggesting a negotiated settlement short of independence was acceptable. Christensen said that this negative feedback from the field was responsible for the public criticism of Ahtisaari (i.e., that he had pressured the GAM too much on the GoI's behalf) and the hardening of the GAM's position over the past few days.

2. (S) Christensen opined to Weisberg that the Tokyo talks several years ago had broken down because of GAM insistence on independence as the sine qua non of any comprehensive settlement, and that he feared this might happen again. He said that the GAM leaders "just don't get it" as regards the lack of international support for Acehnese independence, and that Ahtisaari's frank advice that they should give up their insistence on independence and use the negotiations to get as much as possible out of a "special autonomy" status appeared to have upset some of them. When the DCM asked Christensen if there was any disagreement among the GAM leaders in Stockholm about how to proceed, Christensen replied that "Prime Minister" Malik Mahmud was the "most approachable" and seemed to have the most realistic expectations about the GAM could achieve; others, however, were more influenced by the views of the field commanders that a harder line should be maintained on independence.

3. (S) Christensen also told Weisberg that two representatives from the Henri Dunant Center in Switzerland (Mark Griffiths and Tom Korman) had visited the GAM leaders in Stockholm on February 10 to urge them to accept Ahtisaari's proposal for a second round of talks. Christensen said that if the GAM leaders "will listen to anyone, it will be the Henri Dunant (representatives)." Christensen went on to say that he understood a meeting had occurred at Indonesian Vice President Kalla's home on February 10 to discuss the GoI's strategy for the next round of talks; however, he did not provide any further details of this meeting.

4. (S) Finally, Christensen told the DCM that his (Christensen's) impression was that if a referendum on special autonomy was held in Aceh, 70-85% of Acehnese would support the concept as a permanent solution to the situation. Christensen used this assertion to illustrate how out of touch he believed the GAM's leaders and field commanders to be with actual popular sentiment in Aceh, especially in the wake of the tsunami. Christensen said that after many years of living and working in the region, the impression he got from most Aceh residents was that they couldn't voice their opinion about autonomy; if they voiced support for independence, the TNI